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# THE NATIONAL BOARD OF HEALTH

—IN ITS RELATIONS TO—

The Mississippi Valley and States of the Gulf.

EXCERPT~~✓~~ FROM THE

## BIENNIAL REPORT

—OF THE—

## STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

—TO THE—

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF LOUISIANA.

—BY—

JOSEPH HOLT, M. D.,  
PRESIDENT.

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## THE NATIONAL BOARD OF HEALTH IN ITS RELATIONS TO THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY AND STATES OF THE GULF.

While the relations existing between the Louisiana State Board of Health and every other local, State and general health organization on this Continent are cordial because of a community of interest, and because the controlling influences exercised through the medium of such institutions as the American Public Health Association, the Conference of Boards of Health of the United States, and the Sanitary Council of the Mississippi Valley are wholesome and sufficient, such cannot be said of its relations to the National Board of Health, which is not a general organization, but a centralized, an autocratic and strictly a limited body.

Besides the several occurrences which have compelled the State Board to defend the interest and acknowledged right of a people to regulate those affairs within their own State, not bestowed by the Constitution upon the Federal Government, and therefore not administrative or even regulative, except by the people themselves, there has been and is perfectly apparent such an opportunity, with irresistible temptation to discriminate, in the treatment of the different ports in the different parts of the country, as to make the existence in power of a National Board of Health, tantamount to the destruction of Gulf ports and the closing of the Mississippi, which is the longitudinal high way for the interchange of north—temperate and tropical products between the great valley and the regions of the south, as ordained in the construction of the world.

With a painfully increasing experience of that body—the National Board—we reiterate to-day the sentiments expressed in the address of Dr. Joseph Holt before your Senate Committee on Finance, in 1884.

“The subject of State quarantines has long been a matter of national interest.

On account of the great disquietude for years existing between the States of the Gulf, and in fact throughout the Mississippi valley; the general apprehension and mutual lack of confidence; these States and different communities in the States being at times in a condition closely bordering on one of actual war, with their shot-gun quarantines; the general government conceived the idea of harmonizing these discordant elements by systematizing the whole quarantine as a national institution, which would equalize the practical working of quarantine, and give a stronger guarantee by scientific methods.

The people of Louisiana at first blush, looked upon this with great favor, and presently there sprang into existence the National Board.

With true human instinct this body immediately displayed an intense and grasping desire for more authority.

Our people quickly saw that these national health preservers were certain to become the destroyers of our commercial interests; saw that if it were true, as is generally believed, that the powerful railroad lobby of Eastern capitalists could control Congressional legislation at the National Capitol, how much more easily could it handle any central health board of a few men, should the inducements so to do seem sufficient to that gigantic power.

The tremendous incentive to that course became more and more evident as the present and constantly increasing struggle for the bonanza of trade to the South of us grew in intensity between the longitudinal lines leading from the heart of the continent to the Gulf ports, and the monster latitudinal railroads running to the Atlantic cities.

With the power in the hands of a Central Board, selected and controlled by Eastern capitalists, to proclaim a quarantine of arbitrary detention against vessels from the South, the keys to the gates of the Mississippi Valley would be in the possession of an agency most intensely hostile to the interests of Louisiana and the neighboring States.

Our ports could and would be hermetically sealed arbitrarily for six months in the year, and the vast export trade of the valley forced to travel by the long and expensive latitudinal

lines of railroads, to New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore, our commercial rivals, and hence by extended sea voyage to the tropical ports of delivery, and the import trade forced to seek the reverse journey. In other words, the one side and the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle would have to be followed, instead of proceeding on the shorter base line.

That these powerful aggregations of capital could thus force this trade from the natural channel is evident, if we consider for a moment their immense capacities to achieve the result.

“Weigh for an instant the pressure of hundreds of millions of gold upon feeble human flesh represented in nine members of a National Board, with the controlling power presently in the hands of appointees from New York and other Atlantic ports.

“The great seaports of Norfolk, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston, the whole system of transcontinental railroads, would send a swarm of agents every summer into Louisiana with microscopes and chemicals, hunting for germs; the telegraph wires playing day and night transmitting startling accounts of suspicious discoveries, and the public mind of the whole country whipped into a fever of anxiety, as a prelude to shutting up our port, ostensibly for yellow fever, really, in the commercial interests of rivals.”

Besides, too, the very existence of the National Board, in respect of its importance in the public appreciation and the pay of its members *only while on duty*, depends upon its finding something to do, *even if it has to make it*, which are dangerous incentives, not to be trusted.

The question involved is not one of recent origin, or an issue solely of to-day. The possession and control of the import and export trade of the Valley of the Mississippi and its tributaries has been the cause of a constant struggle between the people of the Atlantic seaboard and those dwelling on the banks and at the mouth of the Great River, coeval in its origin with the earliest settlement of the country.

The first great aim of the French settlers of the Canadas, in 1675, was to find a cheap and convenient outlet to the Gulf.

Subsequently, in 1716, the French people, under the lead of John Law, invested millions of money in establishing a chain of settlements and military outposts along the Mississippi and its tributaries to connect the Canadas and the great Northern Lakes with the Gulf of Mexico, seeking thus to control the commerce of the whole Valley.

An attempted invasion of a portion of this territory by the English "Ohio Trading Company" led to the French and Indian war, which began in 1745, and was waged against the English with relentless fury for eighteen years.

Our interest in this struggle is usually limited to such incidents as Braddock's defeat in the attempt to capture Fort Duquesne, now Pittsburg—the gallant extrication of the British and Colonial troops by young Washington, then twenty-four years of age, and second in command, and the romantic legends which furnished Cooper the themes of his most charming stories. Let us now consider briefly the philosophy of the history of this war.

Besides the natural desire of England, France and Spain to possess themselves, each one through their colonists, of as much of, or if possible, all of the American Continent a second great purpose on the part of the English was to divert the trade of the Mississippi Valley across the Continent to the Atlantic coast. These were the causes of the war.

In his march to the Ohio, Washington became thoroughly imbued with this idea which grew with increasing years, until it developed one of the most remarkable exhibitions of the comprehensive knowledge and far-sightedness of the man who was truly "The Father of his Country."

To possess himself of exact information he made an extensive tour; and may be said to have been the originator of the Chesapeake and Ohio canal.

His maturer views on the subject of maintaining the commercial supremacy of the Atlantic seaboard over the Mississippi river are shown in his letter to Thomas Jefferson, March 29, 1784, and to Benjamin Harrison, October 10, 1784; but nowhere so forcibly as in the one to Richard Henry Lee, President of Congress, August 22, 1785.

“ However singular the opinion may be, I cannot divest myself of it, that the navigation of the Mississippi *at this time*, “ought to be no object with us. On the contrary, until we have “a little time allowed to open and make easy the ways between “the Atlantic States and the Western territory, *the obstruction “had better remain.* \* \* \* \* \*

“ It is clear to me, that the trade of the lakes and of the river “Ohio, as low as the Great Kenhawa, if not to the Falls, may “be brought to the Atlantic ports easier and cheaper, taking “the whole voyage together, than it can be carried to New “Orleans: but once open the door to the latter before the “obstructions are removed from the former, let commercial connections which lead to others be formed, and the habit of that “trade be well established, and it will be found to be no easy “matter to divert it; and vice versa.

“ When the settlements are stronger and more extended to the “westward, the navigation of the Mississippi will be an object “of importance; and we shall then be able, reserving our claims, “to speak a more efficacious language, than policy, I think, “now dictates.”

The idea of the great Virginian, speaking in the interest of his State and of the Atlantic seaboard, that “*the obstruction in the Mississippi river “had better remain,*” as promotive of the turning of the channel of Western commerce to the Atlantic States, has not only been judiciously and consistently followed by the East, in all their votes on Congressional appropriation bills, but would be materially advanced, indeed, finally secured by surrendering into their hands the key of the “Gate of Valley,” through a National Board of Health.

But, to continue our history: Early in the life of our present Government the “Ohio and Chesapeake” and the “Erie,” and subsequently the great Welland canal through the Canadas, were projected and dug with the same object in view, at an aggregate expense of tens of millions of dollars.

These artificial rivers, intended as commercial rivals of the “Father of Waters,” have since been maintained by immense annual appropriations, making them navigable for vessels of considerable tonnage.

The Legislature of New York has at the present moment under consideration an appropriation of \$200,000, to enlarge the canal locks; and the question of allowing navigation, free of toll, as an additional inducement for trade, has been of late years one of the political issues of the Empire State, which will assuredly prevail.

Supplementary and auxiliary to these great water ways, in the effort to control the trade and commerce of the Mississippi basin and to hold it in tributary bondage, railroads of unlimited carrying capacity have been constructed, leading from the great Valley, tapping it at a multitude of points, and reaching out to Norfolk, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Montreal, and Quebec.

Liberal subsidies from various States, counties, cities and towns, assisted and favored by the prevalence of the civil war, which interrupted the direct Southern trade for five years, have enabled the commercial rivals of the people of the South and West already to deflect the tide of a portion of this commerce, constantly swelling in volume, to latitudinal lines of ingress and exit, which should, by natural laws and facilities, pursue the more direct and cheaper longitudinal routes in the interchange of surplus products between the temperate and tropical zones.

With the far-reaching view of enlightened statesmanship, President Jefferson had, by the exercise of Executive power doubtful in its Constitutionality, without the authority of Congress, concluded a treaty, one of the principal objects of which was, not only to acquire the rich and vast territory of Louisiana but to command the outlet and trade of the Mississippi River, the possession of which by a foreign power had, even at that early day, been the fruitful source of disagreement and diplomatic embarrassment.

At the beginning of our late civil war the great heart of the Northwest was not fervently aroused for the preservation of the Union until it saw the outlet of its waterways pass into hostile hands.

While the Commercial Enterprise and acumen of the East has lavished annually the money of the National Government upon the improvement of eastern harbors and rivers, even at one time

attempting the making of the Erie Canal a National Governmental work, to be fostered by the United States Treasury, the same sectional influence has jealously and vigilantly opposed and resisted every appropriation of National treasure to the improvement of the great Southern and Western water-ways, which would induce the return of commerce to its natural and direct channel, through the outlet of the Mississippi river, into the Gulf.

To surrender to the hands of these our commercial rivals, the keys to the portal through which the whole of that commerce should naturally pass and to allow any federally centralized board to hamper, fetter, or embargo the trade of the people of the valley, at the caprice, pleasure or interest of Eastern capital under the pretense of preservation of the public health, would be an act of supreme simplicity and utterly inane folly on the part of the States of the Mississippi Valley.

In vain then would the work of the great Engineer have afforded us deep water to the sea; in vain then would improved methods of quarantine and non-detention have been accomplished by the lavish use of money and improved scientific appliances; in vain then would we adopt expensive and improved methods of sanitation and drainage for the Southern Metropolis, if the communication of this great valley with the outside world were to pass under the arbitrary control of those, whose interest it would be, to block with walls of adamant other routes of commercial traffic than those which lead to their own doors and favor their own local interests.

No more effectual system could be devised by the cunning of human ingenuity to consummate this discrimination so sinister and direful to the commercial and industrial interests of the States of the valley, than the establishment of a *Centralized National Board of Health!*

In addition to these historical considerations, an undisguised eagerness for authority and an inordinate grasping for money have too plainly stamped the character and history of the National Board to be mistaken by any American who values the methods and traditions of our republican system.

The States are not yet *sufficiently enlightened* to surrender to a centralized National Board the power to bind and to loosen. They are still in that state of primitive ignorance in which they maintain the principle that the people of a State are the best judges of their own internal necessities, and best able to determine police and other regulations growing out of them.

In the matter of public health-preservation and the management of quarantine, the States can better agree upon a mutual arrangement than afford to commit such vital affairs, with the enormous power they confer, upon any central board of nine men, itself to be wielded presently by the vast moneyed monopolies representing hostile commercial, railroad and steamship interests to tyranize over and crush the weaker State or section.

The recently attempted forcible seizure of the Yellow Fever Commission was simply a desperate first step in the direction of regaining the power and patronage which slipped from its grasp when permitted no longer to hold its thumb upon the latch of the portal of the Mississippi.

The Louisiana State Board has resisted the National Board of Health, profoundly convinced that to do so was a righteous and patriotic resistance of the most mischievous and threatening organization to which the calamity of a people ever gave birth.



